

# **50**

# **Social Emotional**

# **ELA Games**



Grades 4–12



DAVID PARIS

Copyright © 2023 by David Paris

50 Social Emotional ELA Games. Grades 4–12

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 979-8-87179-068-7

# CONTENTS

<b>Background</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>What, Why, and How</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>SEL Standards</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>UNIT 1: Community Building</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Game 1: Tiny Teach .....	14
Game 2: Move Your Butt If... ..	16
Game 3: Two Truths and a Lie .....	18
Game 4: Concentric Circles .....	19
Game 5: Walk and Talk .....	21
<b>UNIT 2: Communication</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Game 6: Communication Breakdown .....	24
Game 7: Quick Look .....	26
Game 8: Hand, Mouth, and Eyes.....	28
Game 9: Back to Back Drawings.....	30
Game 10: Creator, Sculptor, and Clay .....	32
<b>UNIT 3: Emotional Literacy</b> .....	<b>35</b>
Game 11: Noticing Your Feelings.....	36
Game 12: Feelings Charades.....	38
Game 13: Follow-the-leader: Feelings version .....	40
Game 14: Group Feelings .....	42
Game 15: How do I feel when...? .....	44
Game 16: Emotional Bus .....	46
Game 17: Emotional Roller Coaster .....	48
Game 18: Me Too .....	50
Game 19: Empathy Simile .....	51
Game 20: Movement Empathy .....	53

<b>UNIT 4: Story Games</b> .....	<b>55</b>
Game 21: Collective Story .....	56
Game 22: I'm Sorry, Did You Say... .....	58
Game 23: Yes, and... .....	59
Game 24: Optimist / Pessimist .....	60
Game 25: Who, What, and Where .....	62
<b>UNIT 5: Dialogue Games</b> .....	<b>65</b>
Game 26: Great Questions .....	66
Game 27: Dinner Party Plans .....	68
Game 28: Team Resume.....	69
Game 29: Photo Analysis.....	70
Game 30: Tableau.....	72
Game 31: What Would You Do?.....	74
Game 32: Guess Who .....	76
Game 33: Oranges .....	78
Game 34: Creative Conversations .....	79
Game 35: Questions Combat.....	81
<b>UNIT 6: Persuasion Games</b> .....	<b>83</b>
Game 36: Persuaders.....	84
Game 37: Movie Pitch .....	86
Game 38: Million Dollar Idea.....	88
Game 39: Top 5.....	90
Game 40: Apples to Apples Debates .....	92
Game 41: Where Do You Stand? .....	94
Game 42: Metaphor Challenge .....	96
Game 43: Silly Debate.....	98
Game 44: Lost at Sea.....	100
Game 45: Multiple Choice Debate.....	102
<b>UNIT 7: Group Problem Solving</b> .....	<b>103</b>
Game 46: Blue Magic .....	104
Game 47: Floor is Lava .....	107
Game 48: Blanket Flip .....	109
Game 49: Traffic Jam .....	111
Game 50: Reversal .....	113
<b>About the Author</b> .....	<b>115</b>

# BACKGROUND

In 1993, as a Teach For America Corps member in the South Bronx, I started a journey to revolutionize ELA. I was given a textbook that none of my students could read and was told, “Good luck” with a class my principal deemed the worst he’d seen in his career. Quickly, I needed to learn how to do something different.

We sang and danced our way through sophisticated literature. We played an ELA vocabulary-infused version of Simon Says. We played Dungeons and Dragons. We drank herbal tea after lunch and wrote poetry. We learned formal logic whenever a student had a classroom complaint. And while I fell short of a revolution, I succeeded in making ELA fun, accessible and engaging for students without any previous academic success.

In succeeding years, I integrated theater games to teach literary concepts. We used comedy improv to improve communication skills. We played experiential games from Outward Bound in the classroom. And we sparked dialogue with Socratic seminars and book clubs. I had the best test scores and the happiest students every year, but I still fell short of an ELA revolution.

Only when I immersed myself in my own inner change, did I finally satisfy my pedagogical ambitions. The spark happened when I got divorced from the love of my life, and I was forced to confront that I was the one who needed a revolution. I was an engaging teacher, but completely inept at some basic SEL skills when I needed them most. I had to learn paraphrasing, mediation, perspective taking, skills that I didn’t even know existed. I went through a social emotional training deep dive, and when my personal life became transformed, I knew exactly what was missing from my ELA curriculum. ELA needed SEL.

I spent the next decade harnessing SEL skills with ELA games. I taught and nurtured communication, perspective taking, and responsible decision-making alongside theater games, dialogue, and experiential learning. This combination was the secret sauce that had a transformational impact on hundreds of classes and thousands of students. They learned critical thinking skills, self-management, relationships skills, agency, effective self-connection, and all the tools necessary for ELA and SEL success. I had finally found what I was looking for.

*50 Social Emotional ELA Games* shares the recipe for this secret sauce. Every activity is experiential, engaging, and provides a blueprint for inner and outer metamorphosis. I know it's not easy to do something new, but I guarantee you the impact will be extraordinary and your students' lives will be forever changed. I salute you on your journey and please let me know how your SEL/ELA adventure unfolds.

# WHAT, WHY, AND HOW

## What can Social Emotional ELA Games do for you?

1. Your students will be happy and feel connected. The games are fun, engaging, and add energy for everyone.
2. The positive experience will translate into better relationships and less conflict.
3. Students will develop and nurture ELA skills that will improve academic performance.
4. The class will build emotional and intellectual safety, creating the foundation for a supportive academic community.
5. You will find more enjoyment in teaching!

## Why prioritize emotional skills?

1. As students develop their own emotional literacy, they can navigate their reading and writing experiences with more effectiveness.
2. As students become self-connected, they can understand and analyze fictional characters and the lives of other people.

## Why prioritize social skills?

1. Social Emotional ELA Games create engagement, perspective taking, meaning-making, and belonging. The problem with socializing in school is that it is often associated with off-task behavior and anti-academic pursuits. However, when we can effectively integrate socializing with academic content through group work and class discussions, we exponentially improve intellectual capacity and classroom culture.
2. Communication is at the heart of ELA. There is no better way to practice communicating than doing activities that prioritize communication.

## Why do these games work?

1. Students have a need to be seen, valued, and learn with purpose and relevance. The games validate all of these needs,
2. At all ages, people learn best when they learn through play.

### **What if I don't know how to lead these games?**

1. That is why I wrote the book. The lessons are a practical simple outline for leading extraordinary experiences and you will get better with time. Even if the games are awkward at first, the students will appreciate the effort and the opportunity to do something different, fun, and experiential, despite not being perfect.

### **How will Social Emotional ELA Games affect my classroom management?**

1. Positively. Structured fun builds respect and dissipates conflicts.
2. Social emotional learning games meet the needs of a variety of learning styles, which improves engagement and decreases off-task behavior.
3. Students who struggle during conventional lessons often flourish with social emotional learning games.

### **How do I assess students?**

1. You can use whatever grading system you employ for your ELA classroom.
2. You could have students self-assess by asking, "How effective were you today?" and have students raise or lower their hands on a scale of 1–10.
3. You could have students write on an index card about their experiences at the end of the game and submit the cards to you.
4. Students could have an SEL/ELA notebook to write about their experiences.
5. You can use any form of assessment. The only absolute is that you assess student involvement in some way, otherwise it might not be valued in the eyes of some students. Assessment is a great way to provide visibility, value, and a radar for follow-up conversations. Assessment also gives students the opportunity to track themselves as they improve their SEL and ELA skills.

### **How do I extend the learning experience?**

1. There are reflections at the end of each game that will help students apply what they have learned to other subject matter and their lives. There will also be an organic change just from having a quality classroom experience. However, if you refer back to the lessons learned in these games throughout the year, you will maximize the impact.

You can do that verbally or you can develop a system to track the implementation of a certain skill. The appendix offers an example of how to track SEL skills.

All of the activities are adapted from the book *50 Social Emotional Learning Lessons Vol. 1 and Community Building Games Vol. 1–4* with permission from the author and publisher.



# SEL STANDARDS

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes SEL as “The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

They divide SEL into five standards with corresponding learning objectives:

## **Self-Awareness:**

- Identifying emotions
- Self-perception
- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
- Body-mind awareness

## **Self-Management:**

- Regulation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
- Self-motivation
- Goal setting
- Growth mindset

## **Social Awareness:**

- Empathy
- Perspective-taking
- Respect for others
- Understanding one’s role and contribution within a community

## **Relationships Skills:**

- Communication
- Negotiating conflict constructively
- Teamwork
- Relationship building

**Responsible Decision-Making:**

- Ethical Responsibility
- The ability to use values to guide actions
- Consideration of self and others
- Analyzing problems and brainstorming solutions

If you are new to SEL, the standards and learning objectives can be overwhelming. How do you address these crucial concepts and skills in addition to everything else you do? No worries! That is why I wrote the book. You do not need a master's degree in SEL to meet SEL standards. Simply lead the games in this book and these standards will be met organically.

If you are familiar with these standards and learning objectives, name them at the end of every lesson. SEL language allows students to become intentional about implementing SEL into their lives. The discussion of SEL communicates their importance, which will translate into students valuing them as well.



## UNIT 1: Community Building

**Q: Why should I spend class time on community building games?**

**A:** When students get to know each other through positive interactions that are fun and engaging, they treat each other with kindness, respect, and care. These are the prerequisites of a safe and supportive learning environment, which is the foundation for classroom discussions, dialogue, teamwork, inquiry, and collaboration. Students are less likely to feel isolated or lonely, and more likely to reach out for help when they need it.

**Q: When should I implement community building games?**

**A:** It's best to use these games at the start of the school year to help establish positive relationships between students. However, *Move Your Butt If*, *Concentric Circles*, and *Walk and Talk* can be used throughout the year by using questions pertaining to the current unit of study.



## **GAME 1: Tiny Teach**

**ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

**SEL Standard:**

- Relationship Skills

**Time:**

10–15 mins

**Instructions:**

1. Explain that they are going to be playing a game called “Tiny Teach.”
2. Students will have two minutes to teach someone else in the class something that is easy to learn.
3. Give an example of teaching something that would be easy to learn, such as:
  - a. Teach a few words in another language (but not the entire language) or
  - b. Teach a dance move (but not an entire choreography) or
  - c. Teach a recipe (but not a whole cookbook) or
  - d. Teach a strategy for a video game (but not all of your strategies)
4. Demonstrate with something fun that you like to share.
5. Ask to make sure everyone has something to teach. If a student seems stuck about what to teach, ask them to teach something related to what they like to do. If they still don’t know, ask them to teach a technique they use for getting something they want from a parent.
6. Have students pair up, introduce themselves, and give them two minutes each to teach something.
7. Repeat one or more times with a new student.

**Reflections:**

- What was it like to teach someone else?
- What did you learn about teaching?
- What was it like to be a student?
- What do you need from others to be successful in this class?

**Teacher Note:**

- This game can be used at the beginning of the year before discussing classroom norms.



## **GAME 2: Move Your Butt If...**

### **ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

### **SEL Standard:**

- Relationship Skills

### **Time:**

10 mins

### **Instructions:**

1. Have just enough seats in a circle for everyone but one volunteer who agrees to stand in the middle.
2. The volunteer says, “Move your butt if...” and states something physical like, “You are wearing blue.”
3. If a student who is sitting down is wearing blue, they must get up and find another seat anywhere within the circle, except the seat to their immediate left and right.
4. Tell students to move quickly, but also with safety in mind.
5. The student who remains standing without a seat announces the next statement: “Move your butt if...”
6. After a few rounds of physical criteria, introduce statements of...
  - a. Preferences such as, “Move your butt if you like ice cream” or
  - b. Experiences such as “Move your butt if you have been on a roller coaster”

### **Variations:**

- Tell students to prepare statements about topics they are curious to know about others in the group or what they may have experienced.

- You can play this game without frenetic energy by changing the instruction to ‘Stand up if...’

**Reflections:**

- What was it like to share a commonality with someone else?
- What was it like to be different from the group?
- What are the advantages of having some things in common and having some things not in common with other members of your class?



## **GAME 3: Two Truths and a Lie**

### **ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

### **SEL Standards:**

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

### **Time:**

10 mins

### **Instructions:**

1. Divide the class into groups of 4–6 students.
2. Ask one student to share three statements about themselves. Two statements should be true; the third should be a lie.
3. Explain that the lies should be based on breaking an expectation or an assumption you think people have of you, rather than changing a simple detail.
4. The other students each guess which statement is a lie.
5. The first student then reveals which statement is actually a lie.
6. Rotate roles so that everyone in the group gets at least one chance to share two truths and a lie.

### **Variation:**

- Have a group come to consensus about which statements were true and which statement was false before the speaker reveals it.

### **Reflections:**

- How could you tell what was true and what was a lie?
- What did you think about when you created your own lie?
- What surprised you about someone else?
- Did you learn anything about your assumptions of people from this game?



## **GAME 4: Concentric Circles**

**ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

**SEL Standard:**

- Relationship Skills

**Time:**

20 mins

**Instructions:**

1. Divide the group in half.
2. Have the group form two circles:
  - a. Group A is on the outside and
  - b. Group B is on the inside
3. Have the two groups face each other.
4. Tell Group A that they will be the “talkers” and Group B will be the “listeners.”
5. In 30 seconds, ask Group A to share an answer to a prompt.
6. Group B will just listen and ask questions if there is time.
7. After 30 seconds, have Group B answer the prompt and have Group A listen.
8. Have Group A stand up and rotate one seat clockwise.
9. Repeat.

**Sample Questions:**

- a. If you could travel back anywhere in time, when and where would you go and why?

- b. If you could have any superpower that would be used for good, what superpower would you choose? How would you use it?
- c. What rules are fair and what rules are unfair?
- d. What would you do if you found a wallet on the sidewalk?
- e. What's the best job in the world? What's the worst?

**Variations:**

- After students share, they can share their answer with the whole class.
- Students can also share their partner's answers with the class.
- You can alternate which group gets up and rotates. If group A rotates clockwise after the first share, group B can rotate counter clockwise after the second share.

**Reflections:**

- What was it like to communicate with many students for a small amount of time?
- What was the benefit of this format, and what was challenging?

**Teacher Notes:**

- This activity can be used throughout the year with academic content and for test preparation.
- If there is not enough space for an inner and outer circle, you can have students sit on the outside edges of the classroom. Then have the students count off "one" and "two" until everyone has a number. Tell the "ones" to turn to their left and the "twos" to turn to their right. After the "ones" and "twos" share and listen, the ones stand up and rotate clockwise.



## **GAME 5: Walk and Talk**

**ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

**SEL Standard:**

- Relationship Skills

**Time:**

10–15 mins

**Supplies:**

- Paper and pen/pencil

**Instructions:**

1. Create a pathway for walking around the room.
2. Demonstrate a very slow pace for walking.
3. Pose a prompt or question.
4. Have students find a student they don't know very well, then ask them to slowly walk around the room clockwise together and talk about the prompt.
5. When they are finished, ask them to sit down. Have students do all the following:
  - a. Write down their partner's name
  - b. Write down what their partner said and
  - c. Add their response to the prompt
6. After writing down their responses, ask students to stand up and look for another person to walk and talk with.

**Sample Prompts:**

- a. Describe your worst day ever and your best day ever.
- b. What is the best and worst advice you have ever heard? What is the best and worst advice you ever gave?
- c. If you could have any three guests for a podcast or talk show, who would they be?
- d. If you could relive any part of your life, which part would you relive and why?

**Variations:**

- Introduce controversial topics to talk about.
- Have students ask academic questions.

**Reflections:**

- Did it help you to move while you shared?
- What did you learn about your classmates?



## UNIT 2: Communication

**Q: Why focus on communication games in my ELA classroom?**

**A:** ELA is communication! And students, like most adults, think they are experts in communicating, when they often are not. The games in this unit illuminate this point. Once students are aware that they need to work on their communication skills, this can launch new consciousness for developing clarity in talking, writing, and thinking. This is a journey that is often rewarding, as clarity in language and thought often results in a more effective life.

**Q: How do I integrate the learning into my ELA classroom?**

**A:** Refer back to the need for precise language throughout the year. Bring awareness to the value of clear communication into their personal lives, in literature, and in reading and writing nonfiction. Model paraphrasing in communication. Teach them active listening. Use the communication lessons from *50 Social Emotional Learning Lessons Vol. 1 and 2*. Supplement nonfiction units with articles about communication. Your students' lives will change forever.



## **GAME 6: Communication Breakdown**

**ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

**SEL Standards:**

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

**Time:**

10–15 mins

**Instructions:**

1. Ask for five students to leave the room.
2. Choose a student in the class, Student A, to tell a three or four sentence story.
3. Ask for one student, Student B, to return from outside the room.
4. Have Student A share their story with Student B.
5. Student B asks for Student C to come in from outside the classroom.
6. In front of the class, Student B shares Student A's story with Student C.
7. As details change, ask the class not to laugh.
8. Student C asks for Student D to come in from outside of the classroom.
9. Student C then shares what he or she heard to student D.
10. Repeat until the story is shared five times.
11. Play again, but allow the listener to paraphrase and ask whether they got the story right.

**Reflections:**

- What did you learn about communication?
- How does paraphrasing help communication?
- How can this activity impact your communication in the future?



## **GAME 7: Quick Look**

**ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

**SEL Standards:**

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

**Time:** 15–20 mins

**Supplies:**

- 6 sets of Lego pieces

**Instructions:**

1. Create a Lego structure with one set of Lego pieces and hide it in a part of the room where no one can see it.
2. Divide the class into five equally sized groups and give them each a set of the same Lego pieces.
3. Explain that in the first round, one member from the group will be able to view the model structure for ten seconds and then have one minute to instruct the rest of the group on how to build it.
4. The viewer from each group can not physically help construct the Lego pieces and when the minute is over, they must watch the rest of the activity in silence.
5. When the first round is complete, a new member of the group will repeat the same process.
6. Repeat until only one student remains building the structure.
7. Bring out the original structure and compare the results.

**Variations:**

- Differentiate the time.
- Do the activity in complete silence.

**Reflections:**

- What did you learn about language and communication?
- How did your feelings change at different times in this activity?
- How can this activity impact your communication in the future?



## **GAME 8: Hand, Mouth, and Eyes**

### **ELA Standard:**

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, including those that require active listening and responding.

### **SEL Standards:**

- Self Awareness
- Relationship Skills

### **Time:**

20 mins

### **Supplies:**

- 20 sheets of paper

### **Instructions:**

1. Draw ten simple pictures with geometric shapes on ten different sheets of paper.
2. Divide students into groups of three.
3. Ask each student to choose a role in this activity, either being a “Hand,” “Mouth,” or “Eyes.”
4. The Eyes will get a copy of the picture but can not show it to the other members of the group.
5. The “Eyes” must communicate the content of the picture to the “Mouth” through non-verbal gestures, and they can not talk.
6. The “Mouth” must communicate the non-verbal gestures to the Hand with words.
7. The Hand must have their back turned to both of the other students and attempt to draw the picture based on the “Mouth’s” description.
8. The Hand also can not talk.

9. When the Hand is finished, they turn around and compare their picture with the original.

**Variation:**

- Have two “Hands” complete the drawing.

**Reflections:**

- What did you learn about language and communication?
- How did your feelings change at different times in this activity?
- How can this activity impact your communication in the future?